Essential Belief Statement

I chose to enter the teaching profession, or perhaps the profession chose me, rather unintentionally. I became employed after high school in a clerical job for which I was ill suited. Anxious to leave that position I answered an advertisement in the newspaper for a teacher’s aide working in the local school. I met the special education teacher and she introduced me to her students. Moreover, she introduced me to an environment that was alive with day-to-day challenges and rewards. I was caught up in the energy of the dynamic, stimulating atmosphere of the special education classroom. The teacher, who became my mentor, encouraged me to pursue a teaching career. I trusted her insight as I had witnessed her foster her students’ strengths. My education was interrupted by the birth of my third child and I made the decision to focus my attentions to raising my family. However, the desire to teach continued to exist and I returned to my studies when my youngest started kindergarten. I graduated and was offered a special education position at the local school in which I had worked as a support staff member.

I decided to work in the area of special education for a variety to reasons. Initially, special education appealed to me due to the positive experiences I had had in the composite classroom. As I furthered my education, the processes of teaching and learning became the fascination that prompted me to continue working in this area. Admittedly, the content at the elementary level of special education was not the stimulus, but delving into student learning profiles and breaking down the skills involved in learning the content was the challenge. The methods used to teach particular skills cannot be set, as a single approach may not be effective for all students with disabilities. Therein, lay the appeal for me in working with students who had significantly diverse abilities.

I left the special education classroom to take the position of assistant principal and special services coordinator four years ago. Several retirements within the administration of our primary and middle schools prompted the superintendent to reorganize the structure. Instead of having a principal at each building a single position would oversee both buildings with an assistant in each. The assistant principal at the middle school would also direct guidance and the assistant at the primary level would oversee all special education services, kindergarten through twelfth grade. The superintendent approached me with the question of what my interest might be in regard to taking on new responsibilities. I felt that working in administration would bring another level of understanding to me and I applied for the position. My frame of reference has changed as I now see “a bigger picture”. However, my basic beliefs that all students can learn, and that teaching to an individual’s learning styles and working with their strengths will help them to succeed continue to provide the lens with which I now view others as I visit their classrooms.

As a special education teacher I truly valued the collaboration involved in creating an individualized education plan for each of my students. Various professionals including speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, behavioral specialists, special education and regular education teachers and administration worked together with parents and, at times, students to develop an appropriate learning plan for each student on my caseload. The team met at least annually, but the collaboration and communication was frequent. The resources available to me due to the efforts of the team aided my ability to teach to the individual.

As a result of the district’s recent move toward a standards based system I have seen more collaboration within regular education. The idea of horizontal and vertical teaming has begun to open many classroom doors. Students are being assessed to determine their mastery of skills and receive their education in areas of need from the teacher who is providing instruction in that area. At this time, we are at the beginning, educating teachers, encouraging pilot plans and providing support to those willing to move forward. Teachers involved in the pilots are analyzing student performance data and making decisions concerning student achievement as a grade level team. Eventually, the teaming efforts will include teachers at different levels of expertise in particular subject areas. Students will progress through the standards as they demonstrate mastery. This movement toward “mass customized learning” offers the hope of bringing the entire educational community together working in collaboration for the encouragement of student success.

The leadership role I presently hold allows me to observe different teaching styles and assist teachers in evaluating their effectiveness. I believe that my previous experience managing several educational technicians provided me with some basic skills in evaluating the work of others. I have gained more knowledge through my collaboration with other administrators. In addition to supervising support staff, I sat on the leadership team and acted as teacher leader prior to joining the administration team.

The learning profile created to depict my learning styles suggests that I may be a good listener. I believe that the ability to listen is an important skill to possess in my present position. I have always enjoyed activities that are language based, reading, learning new languages, socializing, word puzzles and games, etc. Cognitively, my verbal skills are stronger than my perceptual skills which is evident in how I approach problems, choose activities and in my interactions. I think that I tend to be more of a “global thinker” and find that the details including the logical process and procedures involved in planning, to be cumbersome. I work at being organized and viewing structures in an organized manner. I often “miss” the details in my surroundings. My profile appears to show this in regard to the lower areas depicted in the graph, logic and visual skills. I do believe that I am social, but also enjoy solitary moments. In fact, working alone, at times, affords me time to organize, experiment, and to find my own way to understanding. Sadly, an understanding of how I learn best has taken years. However, today educational professionals possess more knowledge of the learner and learning process than ever before. We can approach learners with specific methods designed to enhance their learning.

Our school, as part of the district’s movement toward a standards based system, had recently developed a vision. The creation of the vision was a collaborative effort involving the staff at the school. The completed vision was presented adopted this fall.

The China Schools prepare students for success in life and to be contributing members of society. Educators partner with parents and local communities to teach a common set of rigorous and relevant standards. All students will have a voice in their education. Students will develop skills in technology, problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and social interactions. Our schools have a positive atmosphere which promotes strong minds, healthy bodies, environmental stewardship and life long learning.

In my administrative position, I see the goals of the vision being addressed in the classrooms. Teachers are “unpacking” standards, developing lessons and assessments to reflect student learning. Students are using their voices to create codes of conduct, sharing their opinions, power voting and articulating the learning goals of the curriculum. Technology is used and available throughout the buildings with laptops, Promethean boards, ebook readers and a variety of computer software. Social skills groups, PE classes, art, music, community projects, electives, the school forest are a few of the activities designed to make our vision a reality.

Our school and the entire district are changing the structure of the educational system. As part of the movement toward a standards based system we are being asked to have an in depth understanding of curriculum and assessment. A group of classroom teachers, literacy specialists and mathematics specialists have worked with Marzano and Associates to align curriculum to the Common Core standards. The curriculum is now in its second draft stage. Several staff members, including myself, are working on committees to bring the newly aligned curriculum to others for feedback. The first step is to unpack the standard and articulate the skills required to meet the standard. Valid and reliable assessments are a critical piece in the design of the new structure.

The content of this course corresponds well to the work being done in our school system. The subject of the texts is relevant to the present work and will apply to the future work that will be done in the classrooms. I believe that the understandings I develop in response to participating in this course will help me to better contribute to this change process. I also hope to gain more knowledge in order to assist teachers by providing them with informed suggestions and constructive criticisms.